GARDEN CITY ATARI COMPUTER ENTHUSIASTS

1003 Amphion St.
Victoria, B.C.
CANADA V8S 4G2
September/
October 1991

Atari News and Rumours

by Rowland Grant

Times continue to be tough for computer manufacturers. This has caused rather fierce competition. Locally you can now get a 80386SX computer complete, but without hard drive, for as little as $550. VGA color monitors with resolutions up to 1020x768 are selling for under $400. This kind of power and price is very attractive to home users. Low priced sound and colour boards make these fast PC's into fine game machines. Alas, the low-end PC has finally caught up to the ST and the Amiga. And dealers like Future Shop and A & B Sound, that for years sold Commodore or Atari products, now sell only PC's, clones and Macs.

To compete, Atari must keep its prices low. To survive, Atari must reduce its production costs. So Atari has sold its own factory in Taiwan. Atari will have to depend on contractors to make its hardware. Since these contractors need the work just now, Atari's gambit might succeed. However, Atari may lose some quality control if it depends solely on contractor. Of course, Atari claims that it sold its Taiwan factory because the plant was in a residential area and the property value had gone way up, and not because of the recession. That may be true too, since Atari may have made a sixty million dollars on the deal (another source puts the total at 40 million). There are rumours that Atari is trying to get a subsidy from the government of Israel to set up a plant there. Israel needs jobs for its new immigrants from Eastern Europe, so Atari's request might not be unrealistic. Also Israel is near to Atari's largest markets in Europe.

The stiff competition from PC clones seems to be greatest in North America. Advertisements in British journals quote 'new low' ST prices that are the equivalent of at least $200 higher than here. The same is true of prices for the TT, which may be some $500 higher than in Canada. The Mega STe models have only just arrived in Britain, and no prices have been published. The prices of Atari products in France and Germany are similar to Britain. There are signs that Atari sales are beginning to slow down in Europe, but Atari seems reluctant to reduce its European prices any further.

North America is another matter. Sale prices for the 1040 STe are below $400 in both Canada and the U.S. In fact on a currency exchange basis, Atari 1040 STe prices in Canada are probably the lowest in the world. The same trend does not apply to the Mega and TT models however. In California a TT030 with a 50 meg hard drive and 2 megabytes of RAM sells for $1825 US. A recent quote for the same model in Vancouver came to $3400 CDN. So Atari prices around the world vary considerably. North America accounts for little more than ten percent of Atari's sales. Cutting prices here may not cause a large loss to Atari, world wide. And it may be necessary to keep Atari in the North American market.

Perhaps adding power and quality will be important too. I saw a TT for the first time recently. It was hooked up to a large monochrome screen. The new desktop is a definite improvement, but the system as a whole didn't seem to be sufficiently advanced that I would want to pay the price asked. It took so long for the TT to emerge that it really classifies as old technology. Also the TT's case seemed to be made of some glossy plastic that gave it a cheap look. For the money, the least they could have done is made a better looking case! Atari Canada is advertising the TT as a graphics work station. Fully equipped with the big monochrome monitor, this would cost about $5000 CDN. I wonder if the TT can offer any more than the PC clone competition.

The requirements of a graphics work station is lots of screen RAM and lots of speed. You need a very fast CPU because so much of the time is taken up managing the graphics screen. On the old Atari 800 series, the CPU was helped along by a another micro-processor, the Antic chip. This method of having a co-processor to take some of the graphics work load away from the CPU is now available to PC users. I saw a recent review of graphics co-processor boards that are small computers in their own right, complete with four or more megabytes of screen RAM. I am not aware of anything quite like that for the TT. Now in the TT, the CPU (the 68030 microprocessor) has to do all the work. However, there is a source of greater computing power for the TT. This is the Atari transputer. A transputer is a system of CPU chips running in parallel and sharing the computation work. In the past the Atari transputer was a separate box connected to a terminal. Now Atari in Britain has developed a transputer add-on board for the TT and mega STe. It is rumoured that this Atari transputer board, which can accelerate a TT some three to four times, is to be released this year. The expected price with four T800 parallel CPU chips (expandable to 16) may be no more than what it costs for one of those PC co-processor boards (around $1000). Now if Atari could market a new TT (with a nice quality case) complete with an on-board transputer it might just pull itself ahead of the pack again.

There are rumours that Atari is attempting to do that. Sam Tramiel has proclaimed that four new high end ST/TT computers are due for release next year. One of these will be a supercomputer code named Falcon. Also a Jaguar games machine incorporating a 64-bit RISC chip is due to be released at the same time. We've heard this kind of thing before. Let's hope that they can deliver!

An Atari transputer was displayed at the Atari Festival, held in June at Richmond B.C. This transputer was not an add-on board, it was in its own case. Apparently it was fomatting screen objects (drawing elements) almost instantaneously for the attached mega STe. The Atari dealer at the display claimed that the latest Atari transputer model will work five times as fast (50 MIPS) as the the one that he had available. I understand that Atari would like to market the TT as a system through specialist dealers. Such dealers would have the skills and experience to set up graphics work stations, install the UNIX operating system, set up LANs and handle other intricate problems. How curious! Atari is trying to go upscale in getting dealers to provide advanced support. While Apple (which has been the most upscale and expensive of all) is now selling Macs at our mass-marketing Future Shop!

For some time David Small has been developing accelerator boards for the ST computers. I have commented on them before. Over the last year or so, Atari has recognized David as a valuable ally (and critic). David is developing a new accelerator board, the SST, based on the 33 Mhz 68030 microprocessor. This is to be installed in mega ST's. The board also has sockets for the addition of 8 megs of fast RAM. Atari has agreed to licence TOS 2.02 ROM chips for David's new board. Since that is the TOS used in the TT and mega STe's, the 68030 accelerator board would bring an old mega ST completely up to date. Thanks to the efforts of David Small it looks like older models of ST's need not become obsolete very soon.

Word Perfect 4.1 has been available for the ST for some years now. Occasionally, Word Perfect Corp has indicated that it will no longer support the ST market because of small volume of sales. Then there were rumours that the new Word Perfect 5.0 was being developed for the ST. Now version 5.0 will not be released. Apparently, Word Perfect Corp expected a large order from Atari Germany. Atari wanted a word processor to bundle with hardware for businesses, but Atari Germany has decided to buy locally produced software.

There's no doubt that the PC market is large and sometimes profitable. I see in a recent advertisement in BYTE magazine that GFA BASIC is available for DOS computers. The list price for a complete programmer's package is $395 US. As well as expanding into the DOS and Amiga market, GFA for Atari has been enlarged and upgraded. The current version, GFA BASIC 3.5 for the ST can use the features the STe's. An even more powerful version 4.0 has just been released which can handle special functions of the TT as well. This version should be available soon. Most of the GFA BASIC commands for the ST and Amiga computers also work with DOS. For Atari GFA BASIC programmers who would like to develop their software for the DOS world as well, GFA Software Technologies is offering its DOS package at half list price.

There is a small user group in London England, called Club M. It is for ST users who have monochrome monitors. The group is assembling a PD library of black and white games and other monochrome specialties. The club charges no dues. They say that they require only 'dedication, enthusiasm and a sense of humour' from their members.

At its annual meeting in May, Atari Corp announced that the XE computers were still in production. They are being sold in South America, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. There was no mention of disk drives and other equipment for the XE's. One can hope that Atari drives will be available again. Computer Software Services of Rochester N.Y. was developing a generic disk drive connection for its Black Box interface. However, it is rumoured that CSS has been sold to the talented Bob Puff (of BobTerm fame). Whether Bob will find it possible to release new products now, remains to be seen.

But there's still lots of life in the XL/XE world. Reevesoft has updated the Diamond GOS cartridge to version 3.0. The word processor, paint program and publishing program that run in the graphics environment have also been improved, and new manuals have been printed. Registered owners of earlier versions can get upgrades at a modest cost. Reevesoft, 29W150 Old Farm Lane, Warrenville, IL 60555, U.S.A. Also Larry Richardson,(P.O. Box 72, Aurora, CO 80010 U.S.A.), is selling a disk file database and a disk labelier together for $20.00. The database was developed for the Atari clubs of Denver. Well if Atari sells many of its 130XE's to the third world, there's going to be a demand for software and local periodicals. It will be interesting to see what develops.

PROGRESS

Back in the good old days my father used to work in a mine quite literally crushing rock. First they gave him a sledge hammer, then pointed to some boulders and told him to put them all into a certain hole in the ground called a grizzly. They didn't fit.....

Years later I put in some time myself crushing rocks in a mine. Instead of handing me a sledge hammer they pointed out a two story high metal monster which apparently ate large boulders for breakfast. I was seated on a chair beside a conveyor belt bearing feed for the monster and told to keep an eye out for anything that might cause indigestion. So I slaved away all day getting off the chair occasionally to remove bits of timber roof bolts, miner's gloves and used playboy magazines from the conveyor belt and placing them in the garbage or the local library as the case may be. Life was good.

Some years still later I decided to give up crushing rock and try mangling data for a computer instead. First I tried computer programing, but soon discovered that fiddling with bits and bytes to be much harder work than my previous occupation. So I switched to computer operating and wound up running around all day looking for pancake shaped objects called tapes and then pound them into tiny slots on machines called tape drives. As the technology progressed the tapes became smaller so we started calling them cartridges instead, but the job remained the same. Then it finally happened.....

One fine day when I went to work I discovered a huge metal monster at my work station. It was 9 feet tall, 6 feet wide and 40 feet long and bore the name Automatic Tape Library or ATL for short. Inside this ATL monster were some robots which ran around all day much faster than I could pounding cartridges into slots inside the machine. I somehow got the impression that my career prospects had taken a turn for the worse even before my boss came up to me with his eyes full of tears to tell me that my services would no longer be required.

Am I sad? What the heck. You can't get in the way of progress. I've just heard that there's this new job vacancy crushing rocks.....

by Douglas Skrecky

G.C.A.C.E. Library News
Atari ST+Mega

During the summer, while a majority of Atarians have been enjoying exciting trips to Europe, hiking through the woods, lazing about at the beach, or making massive profits by smuggling illegal shipments of Hostess Ding Dongs to slimy, three-eyed aliens from the planet Mars, there have been a small underground group of deranged, fanatical computer enthusiauts working on the GCACE Software Library. Now, with the arrival of September, and several months of near continuous rain to look forward to, most people will be getting back into the computer swing of things. Isn't it good to know that even on the first day you sit down in front of your Atari, first blowing off several centimetres of dust from the keyboard, you will not be forced to use the same old boring programs because, with a snap of your arm, some totally nifty software can be aquired from the Garden City A.C.E. ST library.

A couple of months ago, Steve Lemmen, one of the founding members of GCACE, donated some software. Thanks! One item we received was a 2 player game called "Name This Tune." Basically, what you do is listen to a song, figure out the name, and select it from a list. If you can do this before your opponent does, you earn several points. Wocka Wocka Wow!! The songs can be played from a sound synthesizer but, if you don't own one, the program will use the built-in sound chip. Once you have become bored with the 111 songs on the first disk, we have another one packed full of music so this game can keep you and a friend mindlessly entertained for quite sometime.

The other program Steve gave us is called Midi Maze. However, after I hit fire button, once the game had finished loading, I came to the conclusion, after staring at the title screen for a couple of weeks, that the disk had crashed. Looks like I will have to get another copy.

continued next page

the Pothole bbs

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Atarists interested in buying public domain software may want the disk sent to me by Douglas Skrecky. It is version 3.11 of the AccuSoft disk catalog. The program takes three minutes to load as all the text files have been compacted. You may want to get up from your computer desk and get a bottle of root beer from the fridge while this catalog slowly de-Arcs itself. It's not one of the best disk catalogs I have seen, but at least all the info is there.

Rowland Grant has received a number of public domain games, picture disks, and other tasty treats from his Vancouver friend, Bob Lussier. I still haven't finished examining this latest stuff so I will wait until the next issue of XIO3 before giving you all the details. I should mention, though, that a few of these items are already available for downloading from the PotHole BBS.

Has everybody visited Ron De Pol at his new store, Russell Books, on Fort Street? If not, you may want to do this real soon, especially if you own an Atari ST, as there are a number of old ST magazines available for only $2 each. Unfortunately, there are no disks, but that did not stop me from scooping up an armful. Last time I was at Russell Books, there were still a selection of ST Action mags left but it looked like all the ST Format and ST User issues had been sold. I don't think Ron had enough time to hide any Formats or ST Users mags from me because I snuck-up to Ron's front door and then, in a blinding flash, I ran towards the computer section, leaving tread marks from my shoes on several surprised customers.

Club members who were at the August GCACE meeting probably noticed that even after an extensive search, looking under tables, moving chairs, prying up the floor boards, it was impossible to find the ST Library. That's because I was not able to attend. I heard from several sources that the discussion on printers and printer ribbons, which lasted nearly two hours, made that meeting the best we have had since club was first organized back in 1984. I will do my best to be at the September meeting. Ta for now.

by Ted Skrecky

Peeking Around

by Gordon Hooper

... GEORGE ROSE undergoing a bunch of dental work. Sorry, George. We all know how trying that can be. On another topic, George tells me the eight-bit special interest group which he hosts will start meeting again this month. All you XL and XE owners are invited to these gatherings. Phone George at 652-0572 for time and place ... I'm a little late on this item, but TYLER MACDONALD has rejoined the club after a couple of years absence. Welcome back, Tyler ... Further welcomes to new members RICHARD HANSON and MARIA BRYSON ... JOHN PICKEN says he has finished all his painting (walls, not artistic) and can get back to his main interest, computers. Sounds to me like a better arrangement ... Editor BOB NEX still has delusions about the NFL and Seattle Seahawks being a legitimate league and team. Seems to me the Seahawks have never even attained the lofty reaches of an over .500 season. In the CFL we call teams like that losers. Unlike the B.C. Lions, who have gone all the way and won the Grey Cup. Wake up and smell the jockstraps, Bob ... Our Secretary, ROWLAND GRANT concerned because we seem to have been missed by Puget Sound Atari News in that we haven't received copies for a couple of months. He will be making regular trips to Vancouver and thinks he might be able to pick up our copies when he is over there. This will take some effort as he must make arrangements to have our copies delivered to TERRY SCHREIBER of The Richmond Atari Computer Enthusiasts (T.R.A.C.E.) and then go and pick them up. We appreciate your efforts, Rowland to ensure we continue getting this excellent magazine. We hope to have copies available for sale at $2.50 to club members only in the near future ... I was surprised to learn at our executive meeting that DON BELL of Bellcom (a company he started to distribute eight-bit Atari public domain software) is making a living out of the business. He says he is not getting rich doing it, but is surviving. He obviously has enough business world-wide to do this. We have Bellcom catalogues available at the eight-bit library, so go out and have a look for new software. Prices are reasonable and service fast. The eight-bit still lives ... RON DE POL has his bookstore officially opened and doing business. Check his prices out, they tend to be lower than other bookstores ... And finally we come to TED SKRECKY, who gets his jollies from trashing your ever-humble President. Check out his article in this issue. He seems to overlook the fact I am PRESIDENT and could very easily have him black-balled from the club. Just a word of caution which you will take if prudent, Ted ... As usual, I make my end of column appeal for any news concerning club members which is embarrasing, derogatory, blasphemous or even libelous. I am eagerly awaiting your phone calls to GORD at 386-0857 ...

by Gordon Hooper

General Meetings

by Rowland Grant

The July General meeting was the pizza social at Boston Pizza on Shelbourne. This is the second year that we have held a pizza social; it may become an annual affair. For the most part, the conversation was about computers, especially Atari computers. Your scribe was absent from the August meeting which was devoted to printers and recycling printer ribbons. From all reports, the speaker was very knowledgeable and gave an excellent presentation.

With regards to Club business, we have received issues 50 and 51 of New Atari User. We have not received a shipment of PSANs since June. Enquiries have gone unanswered. Apparently Atari XE's have found their way to North Africa. Recently we received a letter from a user in Algeria wanting more information about his 65XE. We directed him to our French connection Club Cenacle. He didn't say how he found out about us.

The Ol' Hackers (8-bit users) Newsletter is on a disk. We received their July/August issue and it should now be in the Club 8-bit library. It is gives a rather interesting view of a very active group in New York State.
Also we received a letter from Don Bell of Bellcom. He appreciates our support. Now that STart has gone, Don is left with few means of getting to the many 8-bit users that are still out there. Don says that his mailing list is still growing, thanks to customer referrals and support from user groups. Don has devoted most of his time recently to BELLCOM. He says that 8-bit owners are great people. He enjoys his contacts with so many Atari enthusiasts in over 40 countries. He even received orders from XL/XE users on board aircraft carriers in the Gulf. Don is expert in desk top publishing (I believe that he uses an ST) and he has just about finished his magnum opus - a catalogue fully describing the contents of over 600 theme disks for the 8-bit Atari's. And when (or if) sanity returns to our postal service, we will receive a copy. When the copies arrive, I hope that our XL/XE members will each send for a few disks. By doing so, we woud be helping to preserve a valuable resource for ourselves.

While I was making a purchase of a few items (Atari stuff naturally) from Wizard Computers in Vancouver recently, I mentioned that I was in an Atari group in Victoria. The salesman wanted to see my membership card. On seeing it, he gave me a ten percent discount. Wizard still has some 8-bit software and a few printer interfaces. There's lots of ST stuff of course. So when you visit Vancouver, you should take your membership card. Atari dealers there might just give you a break.

editorial

by Bob Nex

I whould like to thank Ted Skrecky for offering to do some pages of this newsletter Ted did pages 7,8 and 9 of this issue. Thanks ted for your input. John Picken has come up with a few more title blocks for this edition of the newsletter, so I whould also wish to thank John as well.

One last item on newsletter submissions. I now have the ability to read and write to 3.5" disks, so I can now accept articals on 3.5" disks. So now you have 3 metods of getting a article to me, 5.25" disk, 3.5" disk and by uploading it to the Pothole BBS. If you have a artical on disk give me a call (at 642-6358) and arrange for pick up. I will return your disk to you when I'm finnished.

COMING EVENTS
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Next general meet is September 19 1991. there will be Demos of ST software. the October general metting will be on the 17 of October.

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16.	Ferguson	Dan	385-2945	Apt.C 1157 Johnson Street	Victoria	B.C.	V8V 3N9	oct91
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20.	Harrison	Michael	381-4198	1135 Mason Street	Victoria	B.C.	V8T 1A5	jul92
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22.	Heslop	Graham	595-3259	1734 Albert Avenue	Victoria	B.C.	V8R 1Z1	jan92
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28.	Loader	Clive	477-8212	4438 Fieldmont Court	Victoria	B.C.	V8N 4Z2	oct91
29.	Lovering	Ken	642-3519	1974 Maple Avenue	Sooke	B.C.	V0S 1N0	may92
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32.	Nex	Bob	642-6358	P.O.Box 1168	Sooke	B.C.	V0S 1N0	mar92
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34.	Prince	Chris	248-3596	576 Wain Road	Parksville	B.C.	V9P 1R1	jul92
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40.	Skrecky	Ted	598-6173	#508-1745 Leighton Road	Victoria	B.C.	V8R 6R6	jan92
41.	Skrecky	Doug	669-4825	#201-1555 Harwood Street	Vancouver	B.C.	V6G 1B8X	nov91
42.	Smotch	Tony	652-5573	2401 Keating Crossroad	Victoria	B.C.		jan92
43.	Thibodeau	Ron	658-4518	5199 Walema Court	Victoria	B.C.	V8Y 2T7	jan92
44.	Towler	John	382-5083	1051 San Marino Cresc.	Victoria	B.C.	V8X 3B3	jan92
45.	Watt	Brian	380-6778	#4-147 Niagara Street	Victoria	B.C.	V8V 1G1	apr92
46.	Williams	Dave & Margaret	592-5147	1012 Redfern Street	Victoria	B.C.	V8S 4G1	oct91
47.	Young	Albert	598-5611	102-1418 Newport Avenue	Victoria	B.C.	V8S 5E9	jan92
48.	Zotzman	Doug	380-1471	2888 Fifth Street	Victoria	B.C.	V8T 4B2	oct91

CAPTIVATING HINTS PART ONE

When the Atari ST computer system first hit the shelves of computer stores, like most new computers, there were only a few game titles available and none of them pushed the system's limits to the max. That was how things were way back in the prehistoric year of 1985. We are now in the 1990's. Today there are mega-loads of computer companies producing vast quantities of computer games. However, most of these products are of rather dubious quality. In fact, there are quite a few games for the old Atari 8-bit line that, when compared to the entertainment software on the ST, show themselves to be of superior quality. Fortunately, every once in a while a computer company such as Mindscape comes along and markets an ST game that is a cut above the rest.

The game I would like to discuss is a most excellent little beasty called Captive. It can be best described as an arcade blast-em-up version of a fantasy role-playing game. Captive is similar to another above average game which, I am sure, many ST users have heard of. It is called Dungeon Master. Like DM, in Captive, you control 4 gung-ho warriors. Their mission is to explore many, nasty, dark, damp prisons, searching for this dude named, Trill, a prisoner who would rather be whooping it up at a party instead of hanging-out in a prison cell.

You, the player of this game, are known as Trill. In the year 2542, you were sentenced to two hundred and fifty years of suspended animation for a crime you did not commit. This definitely did not make your day! However, strange things can occur and before you complete your term in prison, the base's main computer system, having been severely damaged for unknown reasons, revives you just before it shuts down.

For every bit of good news there is a bit of bad news... The bad news is that the door to your cell is locked. Fortunately, while you were a corpsicle, your room was used as a storage area. With the help of a ABCCSI 500/520XL MK viii portable computer, found in your cell, you contact four droids on a space ship. They agree to help you regain your freedom. All the various functions of these androids can be controlled with your portable computer.

These mechanical friends of yours are going to be visiting quite a few prisons before you are found. This mission is slightly complicated by the fact that each prison is infested with many demented, blood-hungry creatures. These locals have only one thing in common.... they don't like strangers. They usually show their dislike of visitors by tearing their arms and legs off. Also, many of these monsters own weapons so don't be surprised if they will eagerly bludgeon, stab, shoot or torch-to-death anybody they can get their hands, tentacles, or whatever, on.

Graphically, and from a playability point of view, this game is utterly fantastic. Not only will you see intricately animated creatures far off in the distance, as they get closer, finer details can be observed such as the evil glint in the monster's eye just before it enthusiastically pulls the trigger of the machine gun held in its hairy hands. Heck, you even get to see the bullets from the machine gun racing towards your comrades. If you can time it correctly, one robot can fire a gun and, with a few microseconds to spare, all four droids can hurriedly move out of the line of fire, thereby avoiding having several metal objects smack into their armoured bodies.

Quite a few pieces of entertainment software offer documentation that can be pretty skimpy. Captive's docs, I must admit, are mickey mouse. This was probably done on purpose so a person playing the game will constantly be in a state of total surprise. This can be rather detrimental when it comes to the survivability of your droids. Knowing some of Captive's many dark secrets can be of great help.

First thing you will see, once the game has completed loading, is a view of the ABCCSI computer. At the top are 5 mini screens, and below to the right, a cluster of buttons, controlling various functions such as the movements of the droids, and to the right of this, the main viewer screen. On the large screen there is a grid map of a section of space, containing a number of planets and moons. A small, flashing green light shows the location of the first base to be explored. By clicking the left mouse button on the planet near the green light and clicking on the "orbit button" on the computer, the spaceship will engage its warp engines. Once in orbit, and before landing, it is advisable to first initialize each droid by placing a memory chip on the brain icon. After doing this, click on the "land" button.

For droids, planets can be unpleasant places to visit. While you may fancy a swim in the ocean, androids are made of metal and tend to sink in deep water. This will cause the untimely demise of your friends. It is best to go directly to the entrance of the prison which, on the first planet, is not far away. There are four buttons which must be pressed in the correct sequence in order to open the door. Do not forget to jot down on paper the combination as you will need it when it comes time to leave the base. After entering the prison, the real fun begins.

Your droids will find themselves in a small room. On the floor is a message & some explosives which should be picked up and on one wall there is a power outlet. These outlets are very useful as while you are busy exploring the prison, each robot will be depleting the energy stored in its chest unit. To recharge the chest, place it next to the electrical outlet. Be warned, thought, that putting other objects such as a droid's head near the socket will cause that object to explode!

Another curious feature of this room is that one wall has a series of balls attached to the bottom. Pushing on this wall will cause it to roll backwards. To order a droid to push the wall, you must click on the "move forward" icon on the portable computer with the right mouse button. After advancing a short distance from the entrance, it will become apparent that there are more than just your robot buddies in this prison. Yup, it is time to do a bit of monster bashing.

At this point you will observe that your selection of weapons happens to be rather limited. If the androids are standing next to a group of creatures, you can command your comrades in the front row to attack the meanies with their fists. Don't use this method of attack with the droids in the back row as they will only hit the guys in front of them. Robots have limited intelligence so if you order them to attack each other, they will do it.

Allowing your mechanical buddies to stay in close proximity to a congregation of monsters for an extended period of time is not wise. Sure, your droids may have fists but the opposition has sharp teeth and/or nasty weapons and will undoubtedly attack. To "hit and run" is a mucho excellent strategy.

Also, do you still remember where that power outlet is? If so, go back to it and stick the "finger" icon for the mouse over it and click. It will become charged with a small supply of energy. From several squares away, bolts of energy can be fired at the enemy. Repeat this process a couple of times and your adversaries will be dead. Attacking from a safe distance will decrease your team's probability of receiving damaging counterstrikes. At later levels, the opposition will have projectile weapons so you will have to do more than just stay a few dozen feet away from them. Attacking and then retreating around a corner and then attacking again is the only way to stay alive.

When a group of beasties snuffs it, a small sack of gold is left behind. Scoop this money up. Also, cupboards, you may notice, are placed in some walls and opening them can reveal free sacks of loot. The coins in one sack can be transfer to a sack held in a hand or in a pack sack. All gold should be put in one sack as each robot can only hold a maximum of 22 items.

Without fail, there are several stores inside each base. The owners of these businesses are always overjoyed to accept your gold and, in return, they can give you all sorts of nifty little toys. If, after buying an item, you find it is not required, sell it back to the store for a full refund. You will only lose money if the object being resold is to a store that does not stock that particular item.

Weapons can be obtained at these shops. The types of arms available are as follows: brawling weapons such as knuckle dusters, swords, handguns, rifles, machine guns, laser guns, canons, and spraygun weapons such as flame-throwers. Would it not be wonderful if, on the first base, you could buy a couple of machine guns for your robots? Unfortunately, you can't. Not only are there no stores sellings such weapons at this level, your droids would not be able to operate such equipment without first aquiring the ability to use it.

For each droid, there is a Status screen. This screen lists many important statistics such as the number of experience and health points. Also listed is the droid's robotics and brawling level, currently at 1 for each. Killing monsters will add valuable experience points. A certain number of these points can be traded to increase the brawling atribute. Everytime this stat is increased, it will cost more experience points to raise it the next time. After a robot has 9 brawling points, a new atribute will appear. That will be for Swords. Once swords is bumped up to 9, you can start working on the android's ability for handling guns. The skill level for the useage of each weapon type can be raised to a max of 24.

I recommend only increasing each droid's brawling level to 9 and then concentrate on enhancing the sword skills for the two warriors in front. Don't boost the sword attribute for the two in back to above 9 because, if they use a non-projectile weapon such as a sword, the two in front will be hacked to death.

On the first base, the valiant warriors guarding the rear can use balls, purchased at any shop, for attacking creatures from a great distance. These are quite effective weapons but watch it as balls are made of rubber and if thrown against a wall, they will bounce back and inflict some damage. A ball placed in a pack sack will automatically be put in a hand once the ball being held is thrown. But, once everyone of your elite killers has a handgun, sell the balls as guns, being awesome murder weapons, will allow you to start racking-up the body count of your enemies at an alarming rate.

The ability to kill the opposition quickly and easily is important but good armour is also necessary for survival. To buy better armour, which can be purchased at stores, each droid's expertise in the field of robotics must be boosted. I am not sure of the maximum level each android can achieve in robotics but raising this skill level is, like weapons, done by swapping experience points for increased skill. The types of armour available at stores are as follows: Human, Tindron, Coppator, Bronzite, Ironide, Chromize, Silvosh, Rosteed, Stenforcer and Titaniux.

For the first base or two, I personally recommend concentrating on improving weapon usage skills. After that, aloting 60% of experience points earned to weapon skills and 40% to robotic skills will result in the creation of a well-balanced team of androids, capable of surviving most encounters with hostile forces.

To further improve your commando group's chances of living to one day tell the story of how they vanquished some of the most dangerous, hideously, powerful monsters in the known universe, the teams movements should be controlled by the keys on your ST keyboard. At higher levels, there are creatures capable of traveling at fantastic speeds so a slight delay on clicking on one of the "movement" icons will give the opposition time to score a few direct hits. The keyboard is a far superior interface when it comes to running down corridors and dodging bullets in open areas.

Besides weapons and armour, one can purchase gadgets such as optics and devscapes from shops. The stores only list the item number of each device so it is easy to buy something which isn't needed. If that occurs, just sell it back to the merchant. To make life a little easier, I will list the item number and the name of each gadget. Optics: I Ag-scan, II Route-finder, III Mapper, IV Radar, V Magna-scan, VI Body-scan, VII Visor-corrector, and VIII Visor. Devscapes: I Anti-grav, II Shield, III Fire-Shield, IV Greaser, V Power-Sapper, VI Fixer, VII Re-charger and VIII Deflector. Not all of these devices are really that useful so I will only discuss some of the more important ones.

The route-finder is a very valuable instrument. Once a base has been completely explored, this device will help guide your team to the entrance. Getting out of the prison quickly is of great importance since the front door will not open unless the prison's power generators are blown up with explosives. Doing this, unfortunately, will cause flames to race through all of the corridors. The generators on the first prison are not far from the exit but on other bases the distance is much greater and, since getting lost is quite easy, a route-finder should be one of the first optics purchased. Bye the way, before nuking the generators, the planet probe must be found as it will give the coordinates of the next prison. On some bases it is possible to obtain two probes.

Radar equipment helps improve your chances of spotting monsters before they lay their blood-shot eyes on your buddies. Also, radar can "see" through walls so before you open a door, you will know if something is anxiously waiting on the other side for diner to be served. You will never regret buying this useful tool.

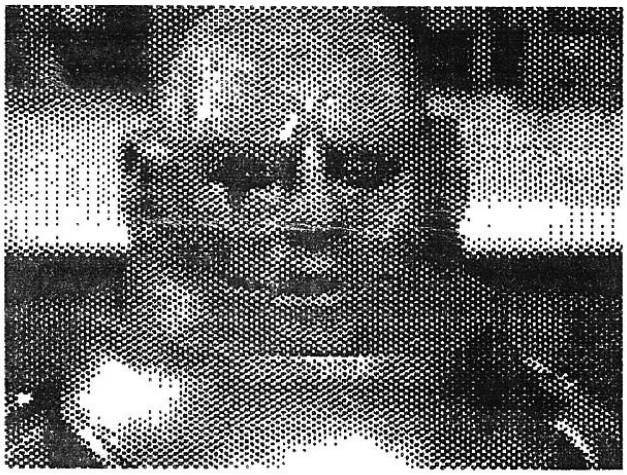
Purchasing one Anti-grav devscape will enable your robots to walk on the ceiling. Bye the time you reach base #5, you will have found that there are some life forms that hover close to the ceiling. Due to the way this game has been designed, if your droids are standing on the floor, weapons such as guns will shoot under these monsters. Rifles, which are aimed higher, will hit them. Unfortunately, most of more powerful weapons such as machine guns and canons are held at the same level as the guns. With the use of an Anti-grav, these armaments of mass destruction will be able to quickly wipe the silly smiles off these beasts. However, one significant factor to keep in mind is that walking on the ceiling will drain the power supply of the droid using the anti-grav at an alarming rate. Only switch on this unit when necessary.

A Mapper will automatically map every corridor that is explored. This helps alot. The area shown on the mapper screen is of only a small portion of the total prison but, by "clicking" anywhere on this screen, it is possible to cause the area being displayed to shift. Doors, elevators, shops and many more of the features of these prisons are depicted on the map. All areas yet to be searched are coloured black. So, if, for example, you believe you have searched everywhere and have not found the power generators, check the mapper and you will undoubtedly find a large black area.

A fair amount of programming effort was put into making the mapper device a very useful item. Finding a power outlet can take along time, especially if you can't remember where any of them are. Once an outlet has been located, a red dot can be placed on the corresponding location on the mapper. Once I discovered this, life was so much simpler. Other important locations can also be marked. There will be times when the power generators are found well before the entire prison has been mapped. By placing several red dots on the mapper, finding the generators later will be no prob.

There is still much to be discussed, but due to space limitations in this issue of XIO 3, the rest of this article will have to be published in the November/December 1991 edition. Stay tuned for PART TWO.

By Ted Skrecky



Before the current GCACE President, Gordon Hooper, purchased an Atari 130XE computer, this is what he looked like. However, with the help of his Atari computer, great advancements were made in the field of cellular restructuring, allowing Ol' Gordo to now more closely resemble famous personalities such as Mel Gibson and Tom Selleck instead of Mr. Potato Head.

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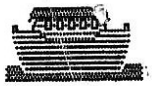

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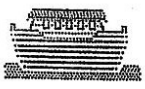

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